



News Release

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Bakersfield OHV Site:

Lack of Public Access, Other Insurmountable Issues Prohibit Bakersfield Off-Highway Vehicle Park, Search for New Site Proposed

SACRAMENTO—Lack of public access and other insurmountable issues will prohibit State Parks from further pursuit of an off-highway vehicle recreation park in the Bakersfield area. However, in making the decision, the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division of State Parks also announced it is not abandoning efforts to find a suitable location within the Central Valley, and will investigate other potential sites in the near future.

"This was an extremely difficult decision," said Daphne Greene, Deputy Director of the State Parks' Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division. "However, our close examination of several significant concerns led us to conclude that those concerns were, in fact, insurmountable and that it would be irresponsible to dedicate additional time and resources to this site. However, we remain committed to finding another site and will work with all concerned stakeholders toward achieving that goal."

Over the past two months, the OHMVR Division conducted an investigation of the outstanding issues in an attempt to seek a resolution which would allow it to move forward with the park. However, to date, the issues of greatest concern have either not been resolved or have been resolved with negative outcomes. Studies that have been conducted reveal substantial problems for the development and sustainability of an off-highway vehicle park. The issues which prevent the State from continuing with the development of this site are as follows:

- **Access:** There currently exists no public access to the project site. Adobe Canyon Road traverses through three neighboring properties but provides no legal ingress or egress. Unfortunately, efforts to purchase these three parcels have proven unsuccessful. The State has an option agreement with the project site property owner, but without access to the site, this agreement will soon expire.
- **In holdings:** In late September, the State received word that a property owner located within the proposed park boundaries was not willing to sell their property. These in holdings present significant challenges in the State's ability to develop and operate the park because these sections lay in the heart of the proposed site, creating obstacles to traffic circulation and essentially cutting the eastern half of the park in two.

- **Soils:** The Division hired the services of the California Geological Survey to analyze the topography and soils at the proposed Bakersfield OHV site. Although this topic had been reviewed in the EIR, it was not analyzed to the level of specificity required by the State to comply with applicable Soil Standards. Due to a lack of vegetation, lack of available water, thin silty soils and soft Tertiary sediments, management of this area presents significant technical challenges for managing sustainable long-term OHV recreation. Because of these challenges, operating costs related to monitoring, maintenance, enforcement and restoration would be unacceptably high when compared to other managed facilities of similar size.
- **Dust:** The soils overlying the Tertiary sediments are thin; the underlying Tertiary sediments are generally soft. While the grasses do provide for some measure of erosion protection, with annual rainfall of six to ten inches per year, it will be very difficult and prohibitively expensive to control dust.
- **Valley Fever:** The soils at the proposed park have a high probability for containing *Coccidioides immitis*, or “valley fever” spores. While this issue is pervasive throughout the Central Valley, studies indicate a higher than normal probability of spores in the soils at the proposed park location. This is consistent with the high concentrations of spores known to exist at the nearby Sharktooth Hill bone bed. As a potential State Vehicular Recreation Area, the proposed park would attract visitors from the local area as well as from throughout the State. The danger of exposing visitors to the high levels of *Coccidioides immitis*, and the attendant risk of litigation, are unacceptably high.

It is the conclusion of the OHMVR Division that any one of these issues alone would be reason for concern. But taken as a whole, they are insurmountable.

The State Parks' OHMVR Division is well aware of the demand for an OHV facility in the Central Valley and is grateful for the support from Kern County, the City of Bakersfield and the surrounding community. It wishes all concerned to understand that while it is discontinuing its pursuit of the existing site, it now plans to move forward with locating another site which is more conducive to supporting sustainable off-highway vehicle recreational activities.

The California State Parks' Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Division operates eight State Vehicle Recreation Areas across the State, including: Prairie City SVRA near Sacramento; Carnegie SVRA, near Livermore; Hollister Hills SVRA, near Hollister; Oceano Dunes SVRA, near San Luis Obispo; Hungry Valley SVRA, along Interstate 5 near Gorman; Ocotillo Wells SVRA, near Borrego Springs; Heber Dunes SVRA, near Ocotillo Wells; and Clay Pit SVRA, near Lake Oroville.

Visitation at these SVRAs has gone from 2.3 million in 2001 to more than 5.4 million in 2005, an increase of 135%.

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